

It's early, but Owens looks special

MAY - 5, 1996

Seifert praises third-round pick

By Matt Maiocco
STAFF WRITER

SANTA CLARA — When rookie wide receiver Terrell Owens first caught a glimpse of the 49ers' playbook, he probably thought it was a large-print edition of "War and Peace."

By comparison, the blueprint for the offense at NCAA Division I-AA Tennessee-Chattanooga was more like "Dick and Jane."

Owens has size: 6-foot-3, 215 pounds. He also has good hands and is an explosive runner in the open field. The 49ers selected Owens in the third round of the draft, the No. 89 player taken overall.

And he already has made an impression after two days of minicamp.

"He's raw, but I'm only saying 'raw' because he doesn't know our system and exactly the way we function," 49ers coach George Seifert said. "But as far as his effort and the basic tools he has, he looks special right now."

Word of Owens spread through the 49ers so fast, that alumni coordinator and former 49ers receiver R.C. Owens came out to the practice field Saturday to watch this new Owens perform.

He left duly impressed.

"He can run, jump, he has speed and can go get the ball," R.C. Owens said. "And, plus, he's a Southern gentleman."

(Owens, the current player, often addresses elders as "Sir.")

Learning the 49ers' system is no easy task for any receiver coming out of college. But it has been considerably more difficult for Owens, who has never faced this kind of challenge.

"He has a workmanlike approach," 49ers receivers coach Larry Kirksey said. "So I'm impressed. Eventually, he'll hit the wall because there will be a point when we give him everything that we do. Right now he's working on the basics. But he'll learn it all. Everyone else who's been here awhile learns it all."

On Saturday, Owens was talking about the "mind-boggling" offense of the 49ers. Owens said his college team ran fewer than 10 pass plays. While he continued describing his college system as "elementary," Iheanyi Uwaezuoke began chuckling in front of his locker next door.

Uwaezuoke, a rookie from Cal, had a better understanding what to expect from the 49ers playbook because his college offense was more sophisticated than that of Tennessee-Chattanooga's. Moreover, Uwaezuoke has spent every day since being drafted in the fifth round April 21 working out with Jerry Rice and J.J. Stokes.

"At Cal, we had a pretty substantial number of pass plays and



Uwaezuoke

Rice was always a hero to Owens. And now that Owens is playing the same position as Rice, he has been learning from the best.

"I'm looking at him as he's running his routes and he's telling me key points," Owens said.

However, sometimes the message can be overshadowed by the messenger.

"It's kind of difficult to listen to what he's saying and at the same time, you're thinking, 'Wow, I'm having a conversation here with Jerry Rice.'"

"It's a pleasure to be out here with him, but at the same time, it's all business."

Owens wore No. 80 in college, a number he wanted because it's what Rice has worn since joining the 49ers in 1985. For now, Owens will gladly wear No. 15 or whatever jersey appears in his locker.

Last season the 49ers carried five receivers. Only John Taylor is not back a year later, having re-

tired after 10 seasons in the NFL. That means for both Owens and Uwaezuoke to make the team as rookies, one would likely have to beat out Nate Singleton or Chris Thomas.

Owens excelled in the Tennessee-Chattanooga, as a three-time All-Southern Conference selection. He holds career school records with 144 receptions for 2,325 yards. His best season was in 1994 when he caught 57 passes for 836 yards and six touchdowns. He was even the sixth man on the school's basketball team.

"He's an athlete is what he is," Kirksey said. "He'll develop and learn the system and hopefully he'll pick up Jerry Rice's habits. So far, he's been a pleasant surprise."

NOTES: Bill Walsh made his first appearance on the practice field late Saturday afternoon as the starters were excused. Walsh, whose new title is administrative assistant, shook hands with several veteran players and watched the backups in seven-on-seven passing drills...

Quarterback Steve Young is scheduled to appear this week on "The Late Show with David Letterman," as the show comes to San Francisco...

Among the non-roster players getting tryouts during the minicamp are former San Jose State quarterback Jeff Garcia and running back Willie Harper Jr., the son of ex-49ers linebacker.

Mom taught 49ers rookie well

AUG 17 1996

'Southern gentleman' gets off to a good start — yes sir

By **Matt Maiocco**
STAFF WRITER

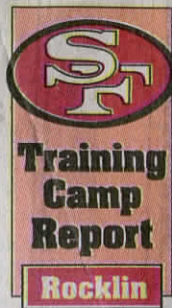
ROCKLIN — Terrell Owens learned the value of hard work from the most accessible of role models while growing up in a single-parent household in Alexander City, Ala.

Although she often worked 14-hour days to put food on the table for her four children, Marilyn Heard was around enough to get her point across to her oldest son.

The San Francisco 49ers used their third-round draft pick to select Owens, a wide receiver from Tennessee-Chattanooga. Last month he signed a three-year, \$840,000 contract with \$270,000 up front as a signing bonus.

Owens isn't the sort to blow a large chunk of change on fancy sports cars or other luxuries. He knows not to take instant wealth for granted.

"It's a way to financially stabilize myself and my family," he said Tuesday after practice at Sierra Col-



lege. "I just put it in the bank. I'm not looking to get anything right now."

The only thing Owens desires is a role as a contributor for the 49ers. So far, he's on track.

Owens, a powerful 6-foot-3, 215-pounder, made favorable impressions during the two off-season minicamps with his speed and hands. The sixth man on the Tennessee-Chattanooga basketball team, he's accustomed to going up for jump balls.

Owens is gaining attention for his comportment off the field, as well.

Former 49ers receiver R.C. Owens, no relation to Terrell (rhymes with Darrell), refers to him as a "Southern gentleman." The younger Owens addresses elders as "Sir." Instead of being an exception, the rookie believes the way he was taught should be the standard for the younger generation.

"I feel like it's respectful," Owens said. "I was always taught to say, 'Yes sir, no sir.' It's funny, in meetings here, a coach will ask a player a question,

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and he'll answer 'yeah, yeah.' And it makes me want to tell them, 'You should say, sir.' They sound disrespectful. But I'm not in a position to tell them that, yet."

Larry Kirksey, 49ers receivers coach, knows the source of Owens' genuine courtesy. It's a lesson taught by Owens' mother.

"I've talked to her several times, and she uses the same respect talking to other people that he does," Kirksey said.

Owens' mother worked hard for her children, holding down two jobs most of the time. Too often she wasn't afforded the luxury of watching him play youth league games because she was busy earning her paychecks. Now, she says all the work was well worth it.

"It's like a fantasy," Heard said. "I always knew he was going to be special. You say it over and over, but when it really does happen, it's better than you could ever have thought. I knew in my heart that if he kept working hard and treated people with respect that he would be a success whether he made it (in the NFL) or not.

Hopes to see son play

"I had to make ends meet. There were times when I would not be able to send him as much

money as I would've liked. I would sit there and cry about it. But he never pressured me about money. He knew I was working as hard as I could."

Heard, who has never been on an airplane, hopes to watch her son play at Candlestick Park this season. His first game last Saturday wasn't televised locally in Alexander City, but her brother was watching, and he called her with catch-by-catch updates.

Owens is accustomed to playing before crowds of 6,000 at Tennessee-Chattanooga's Chamberlain Field. There were 19,088 no-shows Saturday but also 48,577 others who did attend the dress rehearsal against Denver.

"I was kind of nervous two days before," Owens said. "But once I got out there, I wasn't nervous at all. I just went out there and tried to be mentally prepared as far as my assignments and what I had to do."

Owens' mind has been bogged down for the past couple months, trying to fathom a 49ers' voluminous playbook.

At Chattanooga, he had to learn fewer than 10 pass plays. With the 49ers, Owens is up to between 200 and 300. Still, despite all the frustration that comes from learning a system from scratch, Owens appears to be making huge strides.

He was impressive in his first exhibition game, catching three passes for 44 yards. His sliding 13-yard reception at the Denver 1-yard line set up quarterback Jeff Brohm's dive into the end zone to give the 49ers a 17-13 lead with 3:46 remaining.

But Owens' most impressive play may have come early in the third quarter. And he didn't even touch the ball.

A dynamite block

Russell White took a handoff on a sweep around the left side. It was a play that was going nowhere until Owens wiped out two Denver defenders with one block. White gained 22 yards before being forced out of bounds.

"When I was in college at Chattanooga, my coaches always told me to be a blocker before being a receiver," Owens said. "Most people think about being a receiver, they always think about catching the ball. We had the reputation of being physical and being blockers first and receivers second."

Owens is being projected as the 49ers' No. 3 receiver sometime in the future. The door appears to be wide open, but the 49ers' system isn't usually kind to rookies.

Nate Singleton came to the 49ers as a free agent in 1993. For

three seasons he has immersed himself in the offense and knows the intricacies better than any receiver on the roster, except for Jerry Rice.

The past two seasons he entered the regular season as the third receiver, and he's back in that position.

"From the standpoint of coming in here, I would say I'm the third guy," Singleton said. "And if someone wants to be in that position, they'd have to take it from me."

Owens set to make spirited run

Singleton was in position a year ago to improve on his 21 catches of 1994, as injuries to J.J. Stokes and John Taylor would've accounted for a greater reliance on Singleton. But he broke his collarbone in the sixth game, and he returned to play only briefly in the final two games.

Owens certainly isn't counting himself out of the running for the No. 3 job. He's learning both wide-out spots and believes he can make a spirited run to play behind Rice and Stokes.

"Yes, sir, I think I have a chance to play," he said. "I had a great start Saturday in the pre-season. I got to keep showing them what I can do, and everything will take care of itself."

His mother taught him well.

X marks the spot, Owens' stock soars

Rookie receiver comes through in Stokes' place

By Jerry McDonald

STAFF WRITER

OCT 21 1996

SAN FRANCISCO — The team synonymous with quarterback controversies may have one brewing at wide receiver.

Unless Terrell Owens simply turns out to be too good to take out of the lineup.

With second-year man J.J. Stokes out at least three or four more weeks — the club revised its original estimate of two weeks — it isn't difficult to imagine Owens becoming the starter.

Owens' 45-yard game-tying touchdown pass from Steve Young with 2:08 to play is already more significant than any catch Stokes has made in his 18-game career.

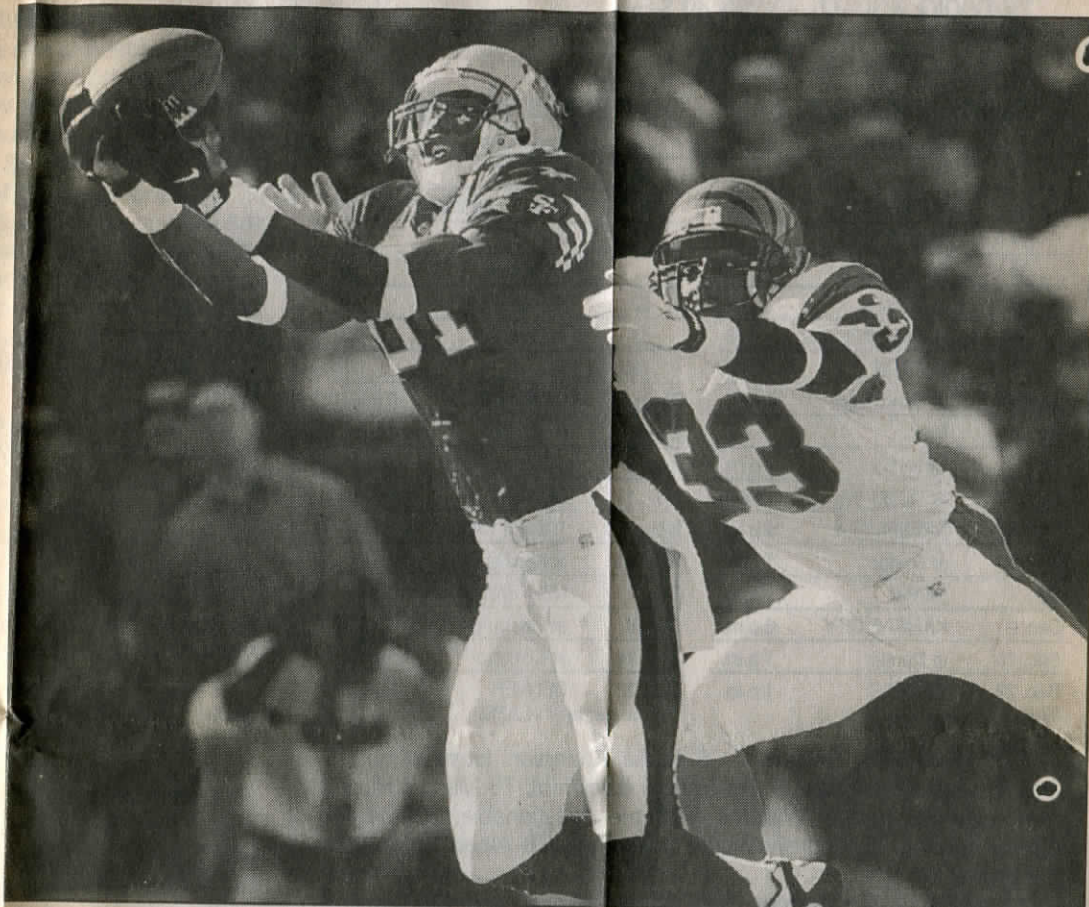
"I was going to try and go outside, (cornerback Ashley Ambrose) played me outside, so I dipped inside and ran a streak," Owens said. "All I had to do was concentrate on the catch — and I made it."

Owens, a second-round draft pick from Tennessee-Chattanooga, finished with four receptions for 94 yards, but his first catch was one he spent the rest of the day trying to make up for.

On the 49ers second possession, Owens caught a 17-yard pass from Young for what could have been a big first down — only to have the ball stripped by Bo Orlando. James Francis recovered the fumble and the Bengals converted the turnover for a 14-0 lead.

"I'm not going to say it was a rookie mistake because I'm a professional now," Owens said. "I was looking to catch all the balls that were thrown to me the rest of the day."

Owens did not start because he normally works at the "Z" position manned by Rice, rather than Stokes' "X" position. He was frustrated following the 49ers loss to Green Bay, and after Stokes' injury, seized the opportunity to learn the different position.



DINO VOURNAS — Staff

49ers wide receiver Terrell Owens reaches for a Steve Young pass ahead of Cincinnati defensive back Ashley Ambrose to help tie the score late in the fourth quarter Sunday.

"After the Green Bay game, I talked to (receivers coach) Larry Kirksey privately and told him I wanted to be on the field," Owens said. "At first I struggled with the offense. The plays were mind-boggling and in the huddle everything is going so fast sometimes I was leaving the huddle and not getting everything Steve Young was saying."

"But this week I came early and stayed late to learn the 'X' position."

Owens' touchdown came as the X man, and even if he doesn't supplant Iheanyi Uwaezuoke as the starter there, he will probably get most of the snaps until Stokes

returns.

"Owens will cause guys to fear him because of his size, strength, and speed," Young said.

Stokes, coming off back-to-back games where he failed to catch a pass, suffered a dislocated bone in his wrist during practice Thursday. Seifert said Friday he could be out as little as two weeks, but sounded more skeptical Sunday.

"Just because of the type of cast they placed him in, it leads me to believe it's going to be another three to four weeks more than we anticipated," Seifert said.